

VZCZCXRO1640
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #0747/01 0921147
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 021147Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1542
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH//
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/TSR ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000747

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY'S RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS DIRECTORATE'S
SUPERFICIAL OUTREACH TO ALEVIS

REF: ANKARA 0112 ISTANBUL 0015

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for reasons
1.4(b), (d)

1.(U) This cable has been coordinated with Consulate General
Istanbul.

12. (C) Summary. Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate
(Diyanet) recently described two outreach initiatives
targetting Turkey's Alevi community. The new programs
include more in-depth training on Alevism for Sunni religious
officials, government sponsored trips to Europe for Alevi
religious leaders to support Alevi education and plans to
publish a definitive Alevi history. Our Alevi contacts
criticized GOT efforts as insincere and charged that they
fall considerably short of achieving the equality of faith
they seek. End summary.

Diyanet's Efforts at Alevi Outreach

3.(SBU) Turkey's estimated 15 to 20 million Alevis have
several long-standing disputes with the GOT, not least of
which are assessments of the community's size, which the GOT
asserts is seven million (ref B). Far from a cohesive group,
Alevis hold diverse opinions concerning religious identity.
The government considers Alevism to be a heterodox Muslim
sect, however most Alevis view their faith as distinct from
Sunni Islam. Their most pressing demands are equal treatment
in public school religion courses and in the allocation of
government resources for the construction and administration
of Alevi gathering places (cem evi).

14. (SBU) Diyanet Foreign Relations Vice Chair Mehmet Gormez
recently told us that the Diyanet is increasing its outreach
efforts to Alevis to dispel the notion that the Diyanet is an
exclusively Sunni organization. Gormez said the Diyanet has
incorporated materials on Alevi history, traditions, and
principles in its training programs for government-appointed
muftis (religious officials) in Turkey and abroad. The
education effort, according to Gormez, is part of Diyanet
President Ali Bardakoglu's effort to "broaden the Diyanet
tent" by helping muftis better address Alevi concerns.

5.(SBU) Gormez told us the Diyanet bases its Alevism
teachings on academic findings made over four years of

studying original Alevite sources. Based on its rigorous academic research, the Diyanet plans to publish a written record of Alevi history that will prevent distortions of Alevi principles for political gain. The Diyanet recently published the first three (of 17) books of Alevi writings with Turkish translations. Gormez said the Diyanet will send these books to all its Muftis and sell them in its bookstores.

6.(SBU) The Diyanet also recently began a program to send Alevi Elders (Dedes) to Europe to assist in Alevi education efforts, Gormez said. At the request of three Alevi associations in Germany, the Diyanet sent several Dedes to Germany to participate in conferences, speaking engagements, and other educational efforts held at cem houses. Most Alevis responded positively, Gormez said, and the Diyanet plans to continue the effort. Some "radical" Alevi organizations rejected the program, claiming it will hinder efforts to promote their own versions and approaches to Alevism, according to Gormez.

Alevis Remain Unimpressed, Critical of Diyanet

7.(C) Alevi contacts and academic experts criticized the Diyanet's efforts as insincere and hypocritical. Pir Sultan Abdal Alevi Association President Kazim Genc told us the Diyanet remains an exclusive, discriminatory Sunni organization. The Diyanet employs only Sunnis, and only meets with Alevi groups that share its views, he said. Middle East Technical University (METU) Anthropology professor Aydan Erdemir, Turkey's foremost expert on Alevi issues, agreed. He told us the Diyanet has never asked to

ANKARA 00000747 002 OF 002

speak to a diverse set of Alevi organizations in order to avoid hearing conflicting views. "This discriminatory attitude discredits and delegitimizes the Diyanet's efforts," Erdemir stated.

8.(C) Alevis also resent the Diyanet's attempts to publish an authoritative interpretation of Alevism. According to Genc, there is no grassroots Alevi demand for the Diyanet to publish what it believes to be the authoritative version of Alevism. Such an "absurd" idea was akin to the Catholic Church publishing an authoritative Orthodox canon to explain to Orthodox Christians the true, correct meaning of Orthodox writings. Professor Erdemir told us the Diyanet's research and publishing endeavor showed a "shocking" level of ignorance of Alevi theology because it ignores the fact that most Alevis value oral tradition much more than written texts. The Diyanet's teaching of "truths" based on written text was based on a faulty premise, he explained.

9.(C) Genc and Erdemir both found the Diyanet's labeling of certain Alevi groups as "radical" unacceptable. The Diyanet labels as "radical" any group that advocates a position distant from Sunni teachings or opposed to the interests of the Diyanet, Genc said. Erdemir charged that the Diyanet has no authority or mandate to label different factions within non-Sunni religious groups in a pejorative manner.

10.(C) Comment: Many of Turkey's Alevis have long found it offensive that the GOT does not recognize them as a distinct religious group or allow them to freely practice their religion. They do not buy the Diyanet's outreach attempts, which they see as window-dressing to placate the EU's demand for more tolerance toward Alevis. The Diyanet's attempts at inclusivity are at least a positive step, but the depth of the Alevi reaction illustrates how wide the gap remains. The GOT will not placate many Alevis until it recognizes their faith as a distinct, official religion. Rather than interpreting Alevi doctrine, Alevis want the government to treat Alevism equally in public school religion courses and in the allocation of public funds for the construction and administration of cem houses. End comment.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON